

Building Gateways to Prevention in Your Community

We all have a role to play in building strong communities in which families and children are valued and supported. It is in these kinds of communities that children are safest from abuse and neglect. Here are some things you can do as a concerned individual.

The Five R's

Prevent Child Abuse America has developed the following "Five R's," which can help individuals better understand the role they can play in child abuse prevention.

Raise the issue.

Call or write your candidates and elected officials to educate them about issues in your community and the need for child abuse prevention, intervention, and treatment programs.

Contact your local school district and faith community to encourage them to sponsor classes and support programs for new parents.

Reach out to kids and parents in your community.

Anything you do to support kids and parents in your family and extended community helps to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

Be a good neighbor. Offer to baby-sit. Donate your children's used clothing, furniture, and toys for use by another family. Be kind and supportive, particularly to new parents and children.

Remember the risk factors.

Child abuse and neglect occur in all segments of our society, but the risk factors are greater in families where parents:

- ✦ Abuse alcohol or drugs
- ✦ Are isolated from their families or communities
- ✦ Have difficulty controlling their anger or stress
- ✦ Appear uninterested in the care, nourishment, or safety of their children
- ✦ Seem to be having serious economic, housing, or personal problems

Recognize the warning signs.

Some of the warning signs that a child might be abused or neglected include:

- ✦ Nervousness around adults
- ✦ Aggression toward adults or other children
- ✦ Inability to stay awake or to concentrate for extended periods
- ✦ Sudden, dramatic changes in personality or activities
- ✦ Acting out sexually or showing interest in sex that is not appropriate for his or her age
- ✦ Frequent or unexplained bruises or injuries
- ✦ Low self-esteem
- ✦ Poor hygiene

Report suspected abuse or neglect.

If you suspect abuse or neglect is occurring, report it—and keep reporting it—until something is done. Contact child protective services (in your local phone book) or your local police department.

Other Ways You Can Help

Build a support network by getting involved in your neighborhood.

- ✦ Develop friendly relationships with your neighbors and their children. Problems often seem less overwhelming when you have support nearby.
- ✦ Get involved in your child's school. Join the parent-teacher organization and attend school events.
- ✦ Talk to your friends and neighbors about child abuse and how to prevent it.

Learn how your community supports children and families.

The following programs may be offered through schools, healthcare clinics, social service agencies, or community- or faith-based organizations:

- ✦ Parent education programs teach parents about child development and parenting skills.
- ✦ Home-visiting programs provide social support, education, and crisis intervention to families at risk for abuse. (See Healthy Families America in the Resource Directory, page 59.)
- ✦ Substance abuse treatment programs can help parents overcome problems with alcohol or other drugs.
- ✦ Well-baby programs provide health and education services to new parents.
- ✦ Childcare programs offer affordable childcare services. This may allow parents to maintain full-time jobs or stay in school while keeping their children safe.
- ✦ Respite care provides relief to families with a child or other family member who is ill or has a disability.
- ✦ Parent mentor programs match experienced, stable parents with parents at risk for abuse. Mentors provide support and model positive parenting skills.
- ✦ Family support centers offer an array of preventive support services, including many of those listed above, as well as referral to other community services. (See Family Support America in the Resource Directory, page 59.)
- ✦ Parent support groups offer a place for parents to meet and discuss parenting issues, exchange ideas, and offer support. (See Circle of Parents and Parents Anonymous[®] Inc. in the Resource Directory, page 59.)

Take part in community prevention efforts.

- ✦ Help local organizations distribute educational materials on parenting and child abuse prevention.
- ✦ Encourage local schools or other community organizations to provide parenting education.
- ✦ Offer to speak to the media and other groups about your own experiences as a parent. Parents Anonymous[®] Inc. has a resource guide, *Media Guide for Parent Leaders*, that may be helpful. (See Resource Directory, page 59.)
- ✦ Organize a fundraiser or a food drive to support an organization that helps families in your community.
- ✦ Offer to teach a seminar on strengthening marriages. Talk with others at community events (neighborhood fairs, back-to-school nights, holiday festivals) about why it is important to have a healthy marriage and how they can strengthen marriages in their communities.
- ✦ Provide friendship and guidance to parents and children who need your help by volunteering for programs such as Befriend-a-Child or Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).
- ✦ Contact your elected officials and ask them to support funding for prevention efforts and policies that support children and families.
- ✦ Make a donation to an organization that works to prevent child abuse. You can donate money, or give clothing, food, or toys to a social service agency that helps families in your community.
- ✦ Start or join a community coalition to prevent child abuse and neglect.